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April 19, 1963

Dr. M. Demerec
Brookhaven National Laboratory
Associated Universities, Inc.
Upton, L.I., New York

Dear Dr. Demerec:

You may recall your letter of March 21, mentioning the meeting you are organizing on June 11 and 12, on nomenclature in bacterial genetics. I am sorry to be unable to attend, as I have already written you. However, an idea has come up meantime that I would like to present for your consideration.

We have recently been learning how to make effective use of computers in helping in the organization of our work and the interpretation of our data. As one project along these lines one of my graduate students, Larry Okun, has been writing computer programs for the organization of our stocks list. The question of nomenclature is of crucial importance for the efficient construction of pedigrees and similar kinds of listing by computer selection. In fact, he has already run into problems of efficient use of the IBM 7090 system in connection with the matching of characters and symbols used in the nomenclature with the word length and character set of the computers. I would like to suggest for your serious consideration that you invite Mr. Okun as a participant in your conference as I believe he already has a unique experience in handling data from this standpoint that should be taken into careful account in the construction of the nomenclature. Although, of course, he is still a youngster in the field he is one of the brightest people that we have ever had, and I think that you would find him a very rewarding member of your group. I would like to stress, however, that he comes for the purpose of presenting his especial insight in computation and the relationship of the nomenclature to this rather than as a representative of any special position that we might have in this laboratory. Computer selection could, of course, play a very important role in organizing data sets like those involved in the analysis of deletions by recombinational analysis.

If you do find it feasible to extend your invitation to Mr. Okun, I wonder if it would be possible for you to facilitate his admission to the Cold Spring Harbor Symposium. I have not wanted to bring this up directly until I heard from you, and any good word you might have to say about it would be very helpful.

Cordially,

Joshua Lederberg